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Monday, November 15, 2010

A Modern Twist on the Prison Industrial Complex

By: Isis Goldberg

In 1997, Angela Davis, author, professor and former Black Panther member, constructed the theory of [prison-industrial complex](#). For decades, the United States government has limited its accountability of the treatment and happenings of its detained citizens by contracting private prisons. These prison tycoons along with the government have benefited not only from the industry that is building and maintaining prisons, but also from the extremely cheap labor which many corporations have profited from including: [Microsoft, Eddie Bauer, J.C. Penney, Victoria's Secret, Best Western Hotels and Honda](#).

Mrs. Davis' ideas have at times been criticized and at times people have gone so far as to accuse her of being a conspiracy theorist with fantastic ideas. Meanwhile, the prison industry owners and corporate giants have profited from the immense number of individuals currently incarcerated in this country, making the United States the country which [incarcerates the most people in the world](#). [One in every three black men and one in every six Latino men will spend time in prison](#) at some point in their lives. Minorities compose [68 %](#) of the current prison population. Some have criticized the prison industry as a form of [modern day slavery](#) because the number incarcerated people are disproportionately people of color. Often times the crimes are either petty crimes which are correlated to impoverished living conditions and non-violent drug possession.

Although it may be difficult to believe, understand, or rationalize the Machiavellian practice of incarcerating people as a business—it is not so farfetched. Lawmakers and private corporations have tried to develop, establish and promulgate a law whose sole purpose is to incarcerate individuals. The most recent targets are immigrants. On October 28, 2010, NPR published an article entitled “[Prison Economics Help Drive Arizona Immigration Law](#)” which shed light into the role that the private prison industry played in pushing forward Arizona's controversial legislation, SB 1070.

The investigation conducted by NPR revealed that Arizona's bill was drafted with the cooperation and participation of a secretive group called the [American Legislative Exchange Council](#) (ALEC). This organization is composed of state legislators and powerful corporations and associations including the Corrections Corporation of America, the largest private prison company in the country which has been subject to [countless lawsuits](#) due to its mismanagement since 1998.

According to NPR, the private prison industry sees immigration detention as their next big money making opportunity. Not only does the private prison industry have this foresight, but they have gone as far as to make campaign donations, hire powerful lobbyists, and hold secretive meetings to perfect a controversial legislative bill which would take the governor of Arizona four days to pass.

The truth of the matter is that more than ever powerful private corporations have more influence and participation in drafting the bills which govern us all. Private corporations which compose ALEC such as: the National Rifle Corporation, Exxonmobil, Reynolds American Incorporation (the big tobacco company), do not have the public welfare at interest. Even if these corporations did not have a reputation for being carless, the bottom line is that corporations have no business contributing or controlling legislation. A corporation does not have a personality, morality or constituents—their only objective and legal obligation is to make as much money for its shareholders by any means necessary.

Posted by The Modern American at [10:20 AM](#)